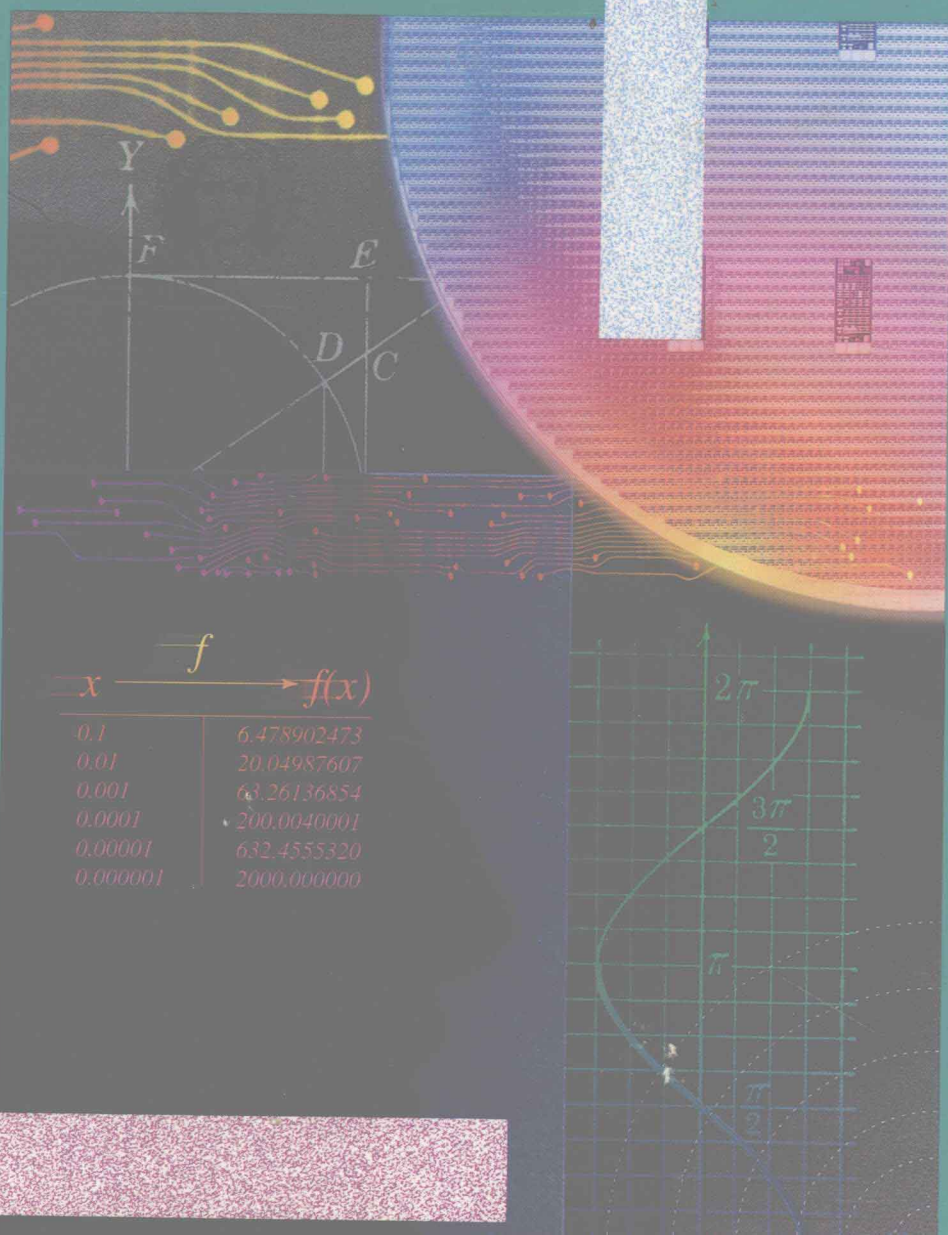


CALCULUS of a SINGLE VARIABLE

Thomas P. Dick
Charles M. Patton



A Writer Teaches Writing

Second Edition
A Complete Revision

DONALD M. MURRAY
University of New Hampshire

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY *Boston*
Dallas Geneva, Illinois Lawrenceville, New Jersey Palo Alto

Copyright © 1985 by Houghton Mifflin Company. All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing by the Publisher. Permission must be obtained from the individual copyright owners as identified herein. Requests for Houghton Mifflin material should be addressed to Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Company, One Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108.

Printed in the U.S.A.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 84-81981
ISBN 0-395-35441-2

BCDEFGHIJ-H-898765

FOR

RICHARD GOODMAN

who is responsible for my becoming
involved in the teaching of teachers

and

DONALD H. GRAVES

who is a constant companion
as we continue to learn to write
and teach teachers so their students
will hear the voices they have never heard

Preface

HOW THIS EDITION IS COMPLETELY NEW

I did not read a page of the first edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing* during the writing of this edition. I did not want to view the subject through the lens of old language and old ideas. Since *A Writer Teaches Writing* was published in 1968 the process approach to the teaching of writing has developed from a fairly new concept to a fully accepted, practiced and researched approach to the teaching of writing. I have learned with and from others across the country who have taught or researched the process approach at every level, from kindergarten through graduate school. There has also been an enormous amount of material published by writers about the writing process in these years. The appendix gives some indication of the resources available. I am indebted to all my colleagues whose journal articles, talks, correspondence, and conversations have instructed me.

My own experience has changed. I've had more than 30,000 individual writing conferences with students since that first edition was published. I've not only taught undergraduate and graduate students, I have run workshops for teachers in this country and in Canada. And I have also worked with professional writers, directed workshops in writing and editing for corporations and served as a writing coach to newspapers. I've been director of Freshman English, supervised the writing staff in an advanced composition course and served as chairperson of the English Department. I have seen the teaching of writing from many different perspectives, and what I have learned is, I hope, in this edition.

Although everything in the book is new, there are six major changes, each one designed to make this edition more helpful to the teacher of composition.

MY INCREASED FAITH IN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

My work with students over the past sixteen years has made me much more confident in the potential that students bring to the writing class. The national hue and cry about the decline in writing skills may be demonstrated at the beginning of the course, but the potential for good writing — in many cases, excellent writing — is within every class. I was an optimist when I wrote the first edition, but my optimism is even greater now. The students at every level I have taught have demonstrated on their final papers that writing skills can be improved. The students we are admitting into our colleges and universities have the potential to write well, and that potential can be realized in a semester. This book makes that faith practical.

I have also supervised an extraordinary range of graduate students and part-time instructors. They have shown an exceptional ability to learn how to teach in a response, conference and workshop oriented program that has been alien to almost all of them upon their arrival at our school. They have not only taught their students — and the papers they have received document the success of their teaching — but they have taught all of us who have been considered “authorities” on the writing and teaching process.

A NEW DESCRIPTION OF THE WRITING PROCESS

The writing process described in this edition is radically different from the one described in the first edition. During the years between the editions I, and many others, have created models of the writing process. Each one is based on new insights and builds on the previous one. That does not mean there is a single theologically identifiable model of the writing process. There are many models. They vary according to the writing task, the experience of the writer, the cognitive and psychological style of the writer, and probably of the observer. I have published many such models, and been taught about the strengths and weaknesses of those models by my students, my colleagues, and my readers. The model in this book is different from any I have previously published. It gives heavy emphasis to planning, and has new insights about the process of revision.

RESPONSE THEORY

One of the most important developments in this book is the description of what I call the *response theory* of teaching. We know that our students

learn best if our instruction follows their experience. That is the way we learned to walk. We tried to walk and were encouraged through the playful, encouraging, expert response of our instructors. If we have faith that our students have something to say and a way of saying it — that they have reason to walk and will be able to walk — then we may be able to learn how to respond to our students' efforts to write in a way that will help them to write more effectively. Carry it a step further; if we create a way for our students to write with a minimum of prior instruction (our instruction often causes bad writing no matter how well-intentioned it is) we may find ways to help our students to respond to and improve their own drafts. As teachers, our job, principally, is to monitor our students' responses to their own drafts, so that they will become more effective readers and writers of their own prose.

This book not only introduces response theory, but shows how it is the most effective and efficient way to teach writing. The reader of the book is shown how the students and the instructor can respond, in writing and orally in conference and in workshop.

WRITING CONFERENCES

My own writing conferences were, in the beginning, brief lectures. I told the students what I thought was right and wrong with their papers, and told them what to do next. I have no deep ethical feelings that this is necessarily wrong. It simply isn't very efficient. Students have to be able to understand, absorb, and implement my instruction. ✓ I have found that it is much more effective to listen to what they have to say about their drafts and to what they intend to do next. I am impressed how much more they know about their subject and how it was written than I could ever know, and how they can make their own instruction clear to themselves if they are confronted with a skillful, experienced reader.

I think this book shows how to become an effective listener and, therefore, writing teacher. I think I have found ways to solve many of the problems of writing conferences, from the problem of finding time to schedule such meetings to the ways in which to handle problem writing and problem students. A large proportion of the book deals with conference teaching in terms that are practical for teachers and diverse instructional environments.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

Writing workshops are an accepted methodology in many programs because they provide the writer with an audience while the writing is in process, and the writer can benefit from the reader's help. They

instruct the writer in effective methods of helping a draft in process, so that the writer will learn how to help himself or herself when no colleagues or instructors are available.

Many workshop members, however, do not seem to know what to do except to exchange papers and support the writer with vague and general praise. This book goes far beyond that and deals with the practical problems of establishing and operating a great variety of writing workshops that will help students learn to write and help instructors deal with the difficulties of workshop teaching.

INSTRUCTORS' QUESTIONS ANSWERED

I think we do have answers to the toughest questions that can be asked of us as teachers of writing. I have tried to anticipate those questions and respond to them. Each instructor, of course, will eventually develop his or her own answers. But the suggested answers provided in this book can be a starting point for consideration of answers that will eventually come from the instructor's own experience.

In all those ways, and in many more, this book has evolved from the earlier edition. It is built on a firmer theoretical base. And the theory that underlines the book has been made practical. The approach is flexible; it can be adapted to the needs of instructors in diverse academic environments. I do not see theory as separate from practice. Practice illuminates and instructs theory; theory illuminates and instructs practice. This is a practical manual by a person who is fascinated with all the little details of writing and teaching writing, as well as the grand questions of composition theory and pedagogy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I find writing and the teaching of writing more exciting, if anything, than when I began writing and teaching. One of the reasons this is true is that I have been part of a stimulating and supportive writing and teaching community at the University of New Hampshire and beyond. I have been taught by my students while they may have thought I was teaching them, and I have been instructed and stimulated by hundreds of colleagues in Durham, New Hampshire, and across Canada and the United States.

I owe a special debt to Donald H. Graves, Lester A. Fisher, Thomas R. Newkirk, Jane Hansen, Thomas A. Carnicelli, and Gary H. Lindberg, with whom I teach at the University of New Hampshire. I have also been taught by a staff of exploited lecturers and teaching assistants who are master teachers of writing. They include Susan B. Wheeler, Mary

Peterson, Brock Dethier, Ruth Clogston, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Virginia Stuart, Rebecca Rule, and Barbara Tindall. I have also learned a great deal from Susan Sowers, a writing researcher at the University of New Hampshire and Harvard University; Dr. Carol Berkenkotter of Michigan Technological University; Christopher Scanlan of *The Providence Journal-Bulletin*; and many other writing and teaching colleagues. I am particularly indebted to the Conference on College Composition and Communication, an organization that has been responsible for the enormous scholarly growth in the discipline of composition theory and practice.

The Houghton Mifflin editorial staff has supported me at every step in the process with good humor and great skill. The book has been made better by the assistance of all those who have read it in draft. I appreciate the responses of Edward Corbett, Ohio State University; Chris Madigan, University of Missouri-St. Louis; Susan Miller, University of Utah; Thomas Newkirk, University of New Hampshire; and Gary Tate, Texas Christian University. They deserve my gratitude but should not be blamed for the failures or eccentricities of the text.

Most of all, I am grateful to Minnie Mae, whose mother always told people, "She does Don's work for him." She was right.

D. M.

The Author

Donald M. Murray, Professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, has conducted workshops for composition teachers across the United States and in Canada. The first edition of this book has become a standard text for teachers of composition. Professor Murray has published articles in the teaching of writing in the principal journals in the discipline, and his books on the writing process include *Learning by Teaching* and *Write to Learn*.

At the University of New Hampshire Mr. Murray has served as Freshman English Director, created and directed an advanced composition course, served as Department Chairperson, teaches as a member of the writing faculty and regularly offers a seminar in the teaching of writing. He has twice won awards for excellence in teaching.

He has also served as a teacher to professionals. He has run workshops for corporations and been a writing coach for a number of papers, including the *Boston Globe*, the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, and the *News and Observer* and *Raleigh Times*. His publications in this field include *Writing For Readers*.

A working writer, Mr. Murray has also published newspaper and magazine articles, juvenile and adult non-fiction books, short stories, novels, and poetry. He won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing.

Contents

Preface	xi
1 Learning to Allow Learning	1
Assumptions	3
<u>2</u> Cultivating Surprise: The Process Theory of Writing	7
Writing for Discovery	7
A Model of the Writing Process	10
Collect	10
Plan	17
3 Drafting, Revising, and Editing	41
Develop	41
Repeat to Revise	56
Edit to Publish	61
Putting the Process to Work	66
4 The First Hour of the First Day	75
5 Inviting Writing: Assignments and Demonstrations	83
Inviting Surprise	84
The Syllabus	89

Writing Assignments	94
Presentations	102
Discussion	104
Demonstrations	105
6 Inviting Writing: Activities and Environments	107
Activities	108
Making a Writing Text Inviting	125
Making an Anthology Inviting	126
Creating an Inviting Environment	127
The Teacher Who Invites Writing	128
7 Responding to Surprise: The Response Theory of Teaching	131
The Challenge of Diversity	132
Taking Advantage of Diversity	135
The Response Theory of Teaching	138
The Terminal Response: The Grade	142
Responsive Teaching in Practice	144
8 Conference Teaching: The Individual Response	147
The Conference Pattern	148
Conference Techniques	160
Conference Skills	162
Conference Problems and Solutions	170
9 Workshop Teaching: The Group Response	187
Reading Writing in Process	187
Writing to Readers	188
Publication	190
The Workshop Pattern	193
The Small Workshop	197
Class Workshops	199
10 Solutions to Common Writing and Teaching Problems	203
Problem Writers	203
Writing Problems	211
Teaching Problems	216
11 Answers to Questions You May Ask Yourself	223

12 Answers to Questions Others May Ask You 237

13 Why Should I Teach Writing? 245

Appendix: Reading and Writing as a Professional 249

Index 261

1 Learning to Allow Learning

It is time to give away the secret: teaching writing is fun.

For decades composition teachers have hidden behind the wailing wall created by literature faculties which have complained about the burdens and frustrations of teaching composition. Their complaints are understandable. They have been trained to teach the best writing of the centuries and then are assigned, without special training, to teach beginning students who do not even want to write.

Even today the majority of composition courses in the country are taught by teachers who do not write, do not know how effective writing is made, and do not know how to teach writing. Of course they are ineffective and discouraged. They expect failure, and they get it.

But in the past twenty-five years the profession of composition teachers has grown to be a self-confident, lively profession that combines research and practice, philosophical inquiry and pedagogy, historical traditions and the new technology. The Conference on College Composition and Communication alone has grown from 1,214 members in 1959 to 6,439 in 1984, and its journal has increased its subscription list from 1,230 to 9,383 during the same years.

Increasing numbers of doctoral programs train researchers, teachers of teachers, and as one person put it, teachers of teachers of teachers. The Bay Area Writing Projects across the country and hundreds of other regional conferences and programs are directed by people who feel confident about the teaching of composition. They publish their articles in many new journals, and there is a constant flow of books on the teaching of composition. Many of these resources are listed in the Appendix. But for all the scholarly apparatus there is a mood unusual in education: most of the scholars in this field delight not only in their scholarship

but also in their students. They accept and even seek students who are uneducated; students who are slotted in remedial programs; students who do not know they have anything to say and a voice in which to say it; students who are making their second, or third, or fourth attempt at an education; students who are anxious and unsure; students who do not fit normal academic patterns. Of course the new composition discipline and its understanding of how writing is made and its discoveries of how that understanding can be communicated to students has a powerful impact on the best students. But the composition profession — to its enormous credit — does not focus its energy on the elite but on those students who have often been ignored in educational systems.

✓ The reason is selfish as much as altruistic. Composition teachers all know the thrill of hearing — with a student — that student's voice for the first time. Experienced composition teachers are able to help students find, in scattered fragments of unfinished prose, their own style. They are able to help students see meaning in their own experience. They are skillful at giving the student the opportunity of an audience.

Professional composition teachers do not look at teaching Freshman English, advanced composition, or even remedial writing as a chore, but as an opportunity. They know what to try, and they know that what they try may fail. But they have other things to try. The teaching of writing, like writing itself, is always experimental. Failure comes with the territory; failure is something to be expected, experienced, shared, laughed at, and used.

This does not mean lowered standards, but raised standards. The defenders of standards, like my former colleague who would say in department meetings, "We are the defenders of the humanistic faith, and we should withhold our knowledge until there is a generation worthy of it," do not raise standards; they simply abandon students who are not pretaught or who do not instantly learn. The new composition teachers bring to each individual student knowledge of extensive research on how people learn to write more effectively; they have an inventory of pedagogical strategies with which to attempt to draw learning out of the student.

These new composition teachers certainly do not have all of the answers. The discipline of composition theory continues to grow and expand. It is increasingly drawing on the knowledge of the past, and it has at last begun to integrate what we know about the teaching of reading and the teaching of literature, so that the profession can enrich itself with a new integration between the subdisciplines of English.

Those who choose to become teachers of composition have a marvelous opportunity. I backed into teaching composition when I joined the faculty as a writer and was assigned, partly against my will, to teach Freshman English and to teach a course for teachers in the teaching of

composition. I did not know that the course for teachers had never been taught. It was given to me because everyone else had turned it down. I became a teacher of composition and a teacher of teachers of composition by accident.

I found myself part of a dedicated group of people who were looking at the magic of writing from many points of view. There were scholars and scientists and therapists and creative writers and intuitive teachers — and they all seemed to share a commitment to students and a belief that writing was important both to the individual who wrote and to the society which received the writing.

I have been proud to be part of this increasing profession, and I welcome you to it. I hope that you will add to the glorious babble of questioning and challenging, experimentation and failure to which we are all contributing.

This book does not describe *the* way to write and *the* way to teach writing. It is simply a book that attempts to describe a way of writing and a way of teaching writing. It is a book by a writer who is still learning to write and a teacher who is still learning to teach.

I hope that the book will share some tricks of the trade from an old pro. I hope that it will give an approach that beginning teachers may find helpful.

ASSUMPTIONS

I think it is important for teachers — and students — to know the assumptions and beliefs on which their teaching is based. Several key assumptions underlie this book.

WRITING IS THINKING

Meaning is not thought up and then written down. The act of writing is an act of thought. This is the principal reason writing should be taught in the academy, yet, ironically, it is this concept that is most often misunderstood by academicians. They give writing assignments based on the assumption that writing begins after the thinking is concluded, and they respond to those assignments as if the etiquette of language were more important than the thinking represented by language.

Writing is not superficial to the intellectual life but central to it; writing is one of the most disciplined ways of making meaning and one of the most effective methods we can use to monitor our own thinking.

We write to think — to be surprised by what appears on the page; to explore our world with language; to discover meaning that teaches

us and that may be worth sharing with others. We do *not* know what we want to say before we say it; we write to know what we want to say.

WRITING IS A PROCESS

Writing is a craft before it is an art; writing may appear magic, but it is our responsibility to take our students backstage to watch the pigeons being tucked up the magician's sleeve. The process of writing can be studied and understood. We can re-create most of what a student or professional writer does to produce effective writing.

The process is not linear, but recursive. The writer passes through the process once, or many times, emphasizing different stages during each passage.

There is not one process, but many. The process varies with the personality or cognitive style of the writer, the experience of the writer, and the nature of the writing task.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING IS RESPONSIVE

We learn best — at least in the study of composition — when we are *not* told in the abstract what to do and then commanded to do it, but are encouraged to write and then have the opportunity to examine what we have done with an experienced writer, who can help us discover what worked and what needs work.

This method of instruction allows the student to learn how to read each draft so that future drafts — on this subject and others — may be
→ improved. The student, when responsive teaching is effective, becomes the student's best teacher.

WRITING IS AN INTERACTION OF THE GLOBAL AND THE PARTICULAR

Traditional writing instruction usually works on the assumption that students need to learn the parts so they can eventually construct a meaningful whole. Traditionally, emphasis is first on vocabulary, spelling, usage, mechanics, and the conventions of manuscript presentation and later on organization, style, and appeals to an audience. Usually the subject is supplied by the instructor since the students do not know anything "substantial." It is logical, but it doesn't work for most students; the particulars are not abstractly significant to students who cannot understand their purpose or importance until they use them to make their own meaning.

Non-traditional composition teaching usually reverses the process and emphasizes personal content and personal voice first, working backwards from global concerns to the particulars of language and manuscript